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Barbershop quartet among many talents at SN

by Grace Janiszewski, Sensors Directorate

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — Delightful old-time harmonies often waft through the halls of the Sensor Automatic Target Recognition division of the Sensors Directorate.

Electrical engineers Marty Justice, Mark Minardi, Vince Velten and Devert Wicker decided four years ago to not only work together, but sing together, forming a barbershop quartet named "Close Enough".

"The camaraderie of these division leaders is infectious," Division Chief Ed Zelnio says. "You talk about team building."

With a combined 80 years of civil service under their belts, their enthusiasm is contagious - not only for the work that they take fierce pride in, but the joy they bring to others with their talents. They love walking into fast food restaurants and breaking into song.

These geeky gents rarely have their pockets unprotected, but are thrilled to share their talents with others. They sing at many official functions both on and off base. At the recent farewell for Col. Larry Strawser, former Deputy Director at SN, they presented an amusing rendition of "Wait till your Star Shines, Larry." According to Strawser, "their act was the hit of the farewell activities."

"Learning a new song takes so long," complained Minardi. "Learning new words is a snap. Zelnio wrote up new words to 'Wait till the Sun Shines Nellie' and we looked over them 30 minutes before we sang that day." Obviously these engineers are bright.

Approximately 70 percent of their performances are gratis. Baritone (and branch chief) Marty Justice says, "We enjoy all of our performances, but to sing at hospice is especially touching. The patients there are so appreciative, and often beg us for 'just one more'."



Pictured left to right are members of the barbershop quartet, "Close Enough": Vince Velten, Mark Minardi, Devert Wicker and Marty Justice.

Bass (and Ph.D.) Devert Wicker agreed. "Knowing what is really going on in the room was incredibly humbling. It was wonderful to bring a bit of joy."

In addition to singing at Children's Medical Center, retirement homes and many local churches, Wicker said, "My favorite gig was singing the national anthem at the Dayton Dragons game. The crowd just roared when we finished."

Zelnio recalled the Valentine's Day that "Close Enough" surprised his wife Sally, a volunteer at Holy Angels School. The kids delighted in not only the music, but seeing Sally blush.

Tenor (and technical advisor) Vince Velton is by far the "geekiest" of them all - having more gadgets than the rest of them. In his palm pilot, he has the key signatures to all the songs they sing, just in case. "You never know when you'll need it," he said.

The Sensors Directorate has many talented employees, both military and civilian, but none have more fun than "Close Enough". @